

# **REPORT ON THE EDITORS WORKSHOP ON THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN WEATHER AND CLIMATE INFORMATION HELD ON JANUARY 18, 2003 AT LANDMARK HOTEL, DAR ES SALAAM.**

## **Executive Summary**

It was established during the media workshop held in Dar Es Salaam in February 2001 that weather and climate information, remained to be among major integral components that would assist in the poverty alleviation strategies. Therefore, participants agreed that there is a need to improve dissemination of weather information to the public, resource managers and policy and decision makers in all weather sensitive sector of the economy if sustainable development is to be achieved.

However, participants, mainly the journalists from various media organization, identified little knowledge of their editors as one of hindrance for the extensive coverage of weather and climate information.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

### **Workshop Objectives**

Information on severe occurrences associated with weather phenomena like la Nina, el Nino, increase in Sea Surface Temperature (SST) need to reach the public and policy makers in timely, accurate and comprehensible manner. In February 2001, a media workshop titled 'The Role of the Media in Disseminating Daily and Seasonal Weather Forecast Reports in Tanzania' was held to provide the participants, mainly journalists from print and electronic media from across the country, with skills and techniques required when handling weather and climate data.

During the workshop, participants cited their editors as the most formidable obstacle in weather and climate reportage. This was because editors in Tanzania have never been sensitized to take weather reports seriously. It was conjured therefore that there was a need to train editors regarding the significance of weather and climate information. This editor's workshop is a result of propositions made by the participants of the first media workshop.

The workshop aimed at unveiling the problems and frustrations facing the Tanzania Meteorological Agency (TMA) in using the media to disseminate weather forecast reports across a large section of the Tanzania society. The workshop also aimed creating good working relationship between the TMA officials and editors, the intention being crafting a rapport between the two sides for better use of weather and climate data. The workshop brought together editors from various media organs and experts from the Tanzania Meteorological Agency (TMA) and other institutions that make use of weather and climate data to deliberate on various issues pertaining to their relationship and cooperation.

### **Participation**

About 50 people attended the workshop. Most of them were editors from leading electronic as well as print media organs in the country. Experts from Tanzania

Meteorological Agency also participated in the workshop. Together with selected experts from other sectors whose activities relate to weather and climate data usage, some of these formed a group of resource persons. The resource persons were drawn from the Prime Ministers Office from the department of Disaster Management. There were also experts from the national power utility company, TANESCO, the Ministry of Health, Food Security and Tanzania School of Journalism (TSJ).

### **OPENING REMARKS**

The Permanent Secretary, Prime Minister Office, Rose Lugembe, who officiated at the opening of the workshop, described it as a timely event noting that it has provided a forum for the weathermen and journalists to meet and exchange their experiences as far as their different obligations are concerned. She noted that TMA officials are experts on preparing weather information but have no journalistic skills to package it for good readership, therefore the workshop provides opportune time for the two sides to confer and exchange experiences. She challenged the participants to work together to develop weather vocabulary that would help to reduce the confusion resulting from difference in understanding of weather and climate data. She also asked many media to regard weather reports as information that should reach the public.

### **PRESENTATIONS:**

#### **Crop Monitoring and Early Warning**

*C. Tibanyenda - National Food Security Division, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security.*

The long term objectives of establishing early warning system is to establish a framework for providing reliable food security information primarily to the government policy and decision makers, donor community and international organizations. The short term or immediate objectives were to provide advance information on crop production and food supply and to generally alert all the concerned well in advance of impending food shortage so that timely decisions and actions could be taken in a rational manner to avert hunger and other forms of food stress.

Weather has significant influence on almost all agricultural operations from and preparation, sowing, weeding, fertilizer application and many other land use systems throughout the growth phases to the final yield of the crops. Weather information is therefore important to enable the farmer determine type of farming that need to be practiced for better results. Here media could play a vital role to give weather information the importance it deserves not only for food security purposes but also for direct and indirect contribution to the social economic development of the country.

#### **Climate and Health**

*Emmanuel Kadete - Ministry of Health*

Climate and weather have significant influence on human health. This is supported by the fact that specific types of communicable diseases are prevalent in areas where there is existence of certain types of climate. Variations on prevailing climate have direct

relationship to the distribution, seasonality and outbreaks of most communicable diseases. Abrupt alteration in weather such as excessive rains, heat or drought may give rise to disease epidemics. For example drought could lead to increased concentration of pathogens in surface water and may lead to hygiene related diseases.

### **Role of Media in the Management of Meteorological Disasters**

**M. Biliala-** *Assistant Director of Disaster Management Department in the Prime Ministers Office*

The media has a vital and unique supporting role to play for successful disaster operations. The capacity to properly communicate and inform all stakeholders is crucial in disaster situation coverage. They enhance public awareness for warning and resources mobilization to support emergence situation. For it to serve its purposes better in this regard, the media should advocate on programs considered to be vital for disaster reduction in the country. The media should also play a pro-active role in publishing disaster management issues. Media need also to mainstream disaster management in their plans. Specifically, meteorological disasters results from drought, floods, pest infestation, tropical cyclones, thunderstorms, dust storms, lightening, strong winds, fog, bush fires, high oceanic and lake waves. The well functioning modern society is effectively based on circulations of information. This is even more relevant in the case of a society vulnerable to natural disasters like Tanzania.

### **Importance of weather and climate information on hydropower production**

**Stanslaus Kizzy-** *Tanzania Electricity Supply Company (TANESCO)*

Weather and climate information is important to TANESCO because it assist in optimizing the company's energy production. Power generation in the country is made up of hydro as well as thermal plants. However, great part of electricity comes from hydro as about 73% of power is produced from this mode. The installed capacity on the interconnected grid is 757MW of which 555MW is hydro. Power generation from hydro plants is dependent on flow of water in the rivers that are mainly a function of rainfall. Spatial and temporal distribution of rain is sometimes poor while its intensity varies in such a way that results into extremes such as droughts or floods.

The generation of power is thus seriously affected by such extreme occurrences. This makes information on seasonal rainfall very important to TANESCO so that it can budget its power production. Weather and climate information that TANESCO need most in its activities is rainfall forecast which includes its onset period and quantity. For instance, if the forecast says that Mtera-Kidatu/Pangani systems will receive enough amount of rain, TANESCO can budget less for purchase of fuel for its Ubungu thermal plants. It will also apply less strict operations at the hydropower plants as well as reducing spills.

### **The Role of Media Training Institutions on Weather and Climate Reporting**

**Professor Mwajabu Possi** - *Principal, Tanzania School of Journalism*

Mass media are recommended channels for disseminating information on weather forecasting. Ideally one expect to get facts and information on the weather and its changes every minute, hour, day, week, month, year, a decade, century etc. through the

media. TMA has been lagging in weather updates as noticed when preparing the paper. The information about weather at Tabora Airport was posted in the web site about two weeks ago. Many people die from thunder and lightening. Some of the lives could be saved by the media by informing people about the dangers of thunder and lightening and how to take care of themselves during rainy seasons.

The fact that Tanzania does not have adverse weather conditions does not substantiate that the country does not need detailed and accurate data on weather. Farmers need to be told very seriously and repeatedly on changing seasons and types of crops to be grown during those seasons. Not much is taught in training institutions about weather forecasting and how to disseminate the information. In fact there was not a single syllabus on weather forecasting or reporting at Tanzania School of Journalism (TSJ), Tumaini and Saint Augustine. A small portion was traced in the syllabus for environment.

No wonder there is not much that has been done on weather reporting apart from reporting temperatures and rains. The articles or serious reports on weather are erratic. There is a need to teach journalists how to use the new media and various communication channels such as radio and television, magazines, newspapers, the internet, e-mails etc, displays such as billboards, posters etc mass marketed recordings such as audience and video tapes, films, records when dealing with weather forecast. Because of the problems associated with modern media, the radio, TV and newspapers may not be adequate means of disseminating information on weather reporting for people in rural areas. Therefore, teachers, students, traditional and low cost media can be used in informing people about weather issues.

### **The need for training journalists in weather and climatic reporting**

*Ayub Rioba - Co-coordinator of Studies-Tanzania School of Journalism (TSJ)*

Given the fact that weather and climatic conditions can sometimes be very unfriendly, meteorologists and journalists need to ensure that they join hands to produce correct and timely information on the same. There is general trend in African countries not to take weather seriously though it is hot topic in European countries.

Since its establishment in 1975, TSJ has been giving specialized courses but it had never prepared a syllabus for weather training. However, with the current move to merge TSJ with the University of Dar Es Salaam, and with introduction of higher courses, the school is already revisiting its curricular to address the shortcomings. The aim is to produce competent journalists who will be able to cover specific areas in order to effectively serve the society that get more sophisticated each day thus demand for specialized information. It would be a travesty of science if anything were left to explain everything, because in the end, nothing would be explaining something. There is also a need to set minimum standards of the curricular for all journalism institutions for until such a move is made, objective of producing specialists in the various areas shall remain elusive.

### **CONTRIBUTIONS:**

Participants made a lot of contribution, which helped the weather and climate experts understand the position of the media with regard to weather and climate reportage. Major contributions were as follows:

***Othman Maalim - Television Zanzibar (TVZ)***

Weathermen should give explanation of signs used in weather forecast reports through electronic media especially TV. People in the villages do not comprehend easily the signs. Information given by Tanzania meteorological Agency does not meet the needs of some communities. For instance, in the Isles, many fishermen expect to be told how the weather would be in the ocean and this information is superficially contained in the weather forecasts. Reports should also be specific in a given area, it is no use to give Kigoma weather forecast to a Pemba Island dweller, and it is of no major concerns to him.

***Mayage Mayage - Habari Corporation***

The Tanzania Meteorological Agency (TMA) has done little to make people understand the importance of weather information. This is because the agency has not publicized it extensively. There is a need to involve many people in collection of weather information such as fishermen who conduct their activities in middle of lakes and ocean as well as people living in remote areas.

***Abubakary Liongo - Radio Uhuru***

TMA should accord all media similar status. It should offer its reports to all newspapers, TV and radio stations across the country. Experience has shown that many people listen to FM stations while TMA have not been issuing its reports to these popular radio stations.

***Ernest Mrutu - TSJ***

There is one TV station that discriminate weather reports given by TMA. There is a need for TMA to sit with the TV station to ensure that they use TMA reports, as what they are beaming at the time is little confusing and it is too general. There is also a need to introduced specialized training to journalists. For them to better comprehend the weather reporting, journalists should undergo special training on weather reporting. TMA should also send its people, especially from public awareness section, to learn ABCs of journalism to easy their communication task.

***Ally Mkoreha - The Guardian Ltd***

Little publication of weather reports is not a problem caused by media organs, it is the way the reports are being written by weather experts that makes editors grade them as news of little importance. For instance it does not give enough impact to only say that there will be a rain, but the effects that the rain would bring are important aspect of such information. To send journalists for a specialized training on weather reporting is expensive undertaking, TMA could use such forums to educate journalists.

***Stephen Chuwa - ITV***

Weather reports, as they are, are not regarded as news that has public appeal.

Stakeholders in the weather sub sector need to issue additional information on weather reports in order to make them 'attractive'. There is a need for co-ordination between TMA and other stakeholders to ensure that before weather reports are issued, there are enough inputs to make the information much more important.

***Nevile Meena - Radio Free Africa***

There is a need to involve more stakeholders in weather information for them to have a meaning in normal people's lives.

***Yassin Sadik - Hoja Newspaper***

TMA need to be close to the people. The situation show that TMA has been running from people. For instance not allow people could read a paper or listen to the radio, therefore, TMA should establish centers to issue weather information in public places such as bus terminals. TMA should also send its workers to learn ABCs of journalist in order to equip them with knowledge of formulating weather information into attractive stories.

### **REACTION:**

The contributions from the participants attracted reaction from the experts. Reacting to some of the remarks, the ***TMA Director of Forecast, Mr. Tibaijuka*** noted that TMA has established a web site and there are people who are assigned to post updated information on the site. Information posted at the web site includes the general daily forecasts for the whole country as well as monthly and seasonal updates. On the need for upgrading training on weather and climate data, he said that the Agency had participated in the curriculum development as a member of the national committee on secondary school curriculum. The participation enabled it to ensure that weather and climate aspects were included in science and geography subjects in secondary school education. On why TMA has been issuing forecast similar to that of astrologers (meaning non-consistent forecast), Tibaijuka said that in order for TMA experts to precisely [predict the exact weather of a certain place, many parameters are needed and the agency has been facing shortage of equipment needed to obtain these parameters.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

A lot of recommendations were issued in the workshop. Some of the recommendations were given when the participants presented their various papers or when participants contributed to the debate. There were eight presentations, but more time was spent for discussion, where editors express their views on how the dissemination of weather and climate information can be improved. Meteorologists and other experts express their complaints and comments on how the media have been handling their information. Another valuable recommendations were drawn from evaluations forms that each participant filled at the end of the workshop.

### **Major recommendations listed were as follows:**

***Trainers:***

In her presentation the Tanzania School of Journalism (TSJ) Principal, Professor Mwajabu Possi, remarked before the Editors that training on climate/weather and dissemination of such information is lacking among schools of journalism in the country. For instance she pointed out that there is no single syllabus on weather forecasting or reporting at TSJ and other training institutions but a small portion was traced in the syllabus for science and environment. To address this situation, she noted that TSJ is going to 'slowly' incorporate climate reporting in its syllabus.

***Tanzania Meteorological Agency (TMA).***

The main concerns raised by the TMA were that the media has failed to give the attention and importance on the weather story as deserving. In some instances the media tends to edit the story in such a way as it loses meaning. Moreover the TMA pointed out to the editors that they tend to ignore most of their information but when it comes to disastrous consequences then the media will have a field day.

***Editors.***

The editors pointed out to the TMA that always the statement issued by the agency has difficulty jargon that puts them off.

Also the information given in the statement is dull and hence does not attract readers. They recommended that there is need to train TMA staff on presentation skills, other side journalists needs training and exposure to acquire skills to make them specialize in this field.

***To Bring TMA Close to People.***

In order to bring TMA and their product close to the people, participants recommended that there is need to introduce Kiswahili monthly Newsletter, which will be distributed to the end users, especially in rural areas; Introducing Corporate Video for TMA to enable the public to know what the agency does and its role in their daily life; To introduce Television Commercials, Promotions and exhibitions all aimed at enhancing good delivery. This needs money. Truly, I am not sure if the agency can afford, but it's a challenge that needs our attention.

**CONCLUSION:**

It goes without saying that the findings from the workshops have given the researchers an insight on the editors mindset and what the TMA should do in order to enjoy both air time and space, and indeed, in a prominent manner. From that workshop, the researcher found that there is urgent need to timely act on the some of the recommendations raised by participants, such as establishing monthly newsletter to reach the end users effectively in their language (Kiswahili). Also it is important for TMA to contact media experts in preparing corporate video in order to promote the activities of agency to the general public.

**REPORT ON THE EDITORS WORKSHOP ON THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN  
WEATHER AND CLIMATE INFORMATION HELD ON JANUARY 18, 2003 AT  
LANDMARK HOTEL, DAR ES SALAAM.**

***Principal Investigator (PI)***

Mr. Mbaraka Islam,  
Senior Journalist,  
Habari Corporation,  
P.O. Box 4793  
Dar es Salaam,

***Investigators:***

1. Dr. Mohammed Mhita,  
PR with WMO and  
Director General,  
Tanzania Meteorological Agency (TMA),  
P.O. Box 3056,  
Dar es Salaam.

2. Mr. Jerome B. Ng'itu,  
Journalism Trainer,  
P.O. Box 33402,  
Dar es Salaam.